**Resetting the transatlantic relations under Biden?**

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Europe and America have traditionally always been allies, but under Donald Trump the US has been acting more unilaterally, withdrawing from treaties and international organisations. With Joe Biden taking over the reins from 20 January, the EU sees it as an opportunity to relaunch cooperation. On 2 December 2020, the European Commission put forward a proposal for a new transatlantic agenda allowing the partners to work together on a variety of issues. The Council also reaffirmed the importance of the partnership in its conclusions on 7 December. Parliament is also looking forward to closer cooperation. On 7 November, Parliament President David Sassoli tweeted: “The world needs a strong relationship between Europe and the US – especially in these difficult times. We look forward to working together to fight Covid-19, climate change, and address rising inequality.”

Brussels is looking for closer cooperation with the US. It wants to focus on core priorities, like fighting the pandemic and its economic fallout, tackling climate change, and finding common ground on digital and trade policies. EU-US relations will not return to how they were before Donald Trump came to power, according to the European Commission’s top trade official. Sabine Weyland, the EU’s director-general for trade, was speaking at a videoconference for the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, ahead of Joe Biden’s inauguration as the US’ 46th president on Wednesday.

In a document entitled “A new EU-U.S. agenda for global change,” the European Commission defined four major policy areas to focus on: health response, climate change, trade and tech, and security. Going forward, the EU said it wants a “transatlantic dialogue on the responsibility of online platforms and Big Tech, to find global solutions for fair taxation and market distortions in the digital economy. “The commission wants stronger cooperation in tackling the coronavirus health emergency which has claimed nearly 1.5 million lives around the world.

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Technology, trade and standards: From genetically modified food to beef treated with hormones, the EU and the US have had their share of trade disputes. However, both have much to gain from removing barriers. In 2018 Trump imposed tariffs on steel and aluminium, which led to the EU to impose tariffs on American products. Biden coming in as president is another chance for constructive talks. The EU and the US could also collaborate on reforming the World Trade Organisation, protecting critical technologies and deciding new regulations and standards. The US is currently blocking the dispute resolution mechanisms established under the organisation. The Commission has also offered cooperation on challenges linked to digitalisation, such as fair taxation and market distortions. As a lot of leading digital companies are American, the issue of how to tax them could be sensitive.

Foreign relations: The EU and the US also share a commitment to promoting democracy and human rights. Together they could work on strengthening the multilateral system. However, in some cases they disagree on the best way to proceed. They both face the challenge of finding the best way to deal with China. Under Trump the US has been a lot more confrontational, while the EU focused more on diplomacy. In December 2020 EU negotiators agreed a Comprehensive Agreement on Investment with China. The deal is currently being scrutinised by the Parliament. Its consent is needed for it to enter into force. The new American leadership represents an opportunity to coordinate their approaches more and better. Iran is another topic on which the EU and the US have taken different approaches. Both the US and the EU were involved with the Iran nuclear agreement to avoid the country being able to pursue a nuclear weapon until Trump withdrew the US from it in 2018. The start of a new US president could be an occasion for a common approach.

The Covid-19: The commission wants stronger cooperation in tackling the coronavirus health emergency, which has killed nearly 1.5 million people around the world. In its latest plan, it said: “The EU and the US should ensure funding for the development and equitable global distribution of vaccines, tests and treatments.” Addressing the pandemic has also been an issue during the Trump administration, with the president taking unilateral decisions, namely to shut down American travel with EU nations without informing European policymakers first. Trump also halted funding to the World Health Organization and announced the U.S.’s intention to stop being a member of that institution. The EU said they need to “work to reinforce and reform the World Health Organization.”

Climate change & security: The EU is also hoping for stronger coordination in fighting climate change. President-elect Biden has promised to bring the U.S. back into the Paris climate agreement, which sets emission targets, after Trump turned his back on the deal. According to the commission, trans-Atlantic aims should feature the fight against deforestation and ocean protection. The EU suggested a closer alignment “to support democratic values around the world, as well as global and regional stability, prosperity, and conflict resolution” – a political direction that could ultimately impact how the U.S. and the EU negotiate with China. A summit between the U.S. and the EU could take place in the first half of 2021.

The Change in European thinking & expectation: Understandably, Europeans’ attitudes towards the United States have undergone a massive change. Majorities in key member states now think the US political system is broken, and that Europe cannot just rely on the US to defend it. They evaluate the EU and/or their own countries’ systems much more positively than that of the US – and look to Berlin rather than Washington as the most important partner. There are geopolitical consequences to American weakness. A majority believe that China will be more powerful than the US within a decade and would want their country to stay neutral in a conflict between the two superpowers. Two-thirds of respondents thought the EU should develop its defence capacities.

Today, the Europeans expect from the new Biden Government that Washington should strive to work together with others instead of focusing on narrow-minded solo runs. Acting multilaterally has many advantages which will make it in America’s interest to summon international coalitions. For once, such an approach is much more likely to lead to success in an age when many of the world’s greatest challenges – from climate change to global pandemics to migration to international terrorism to nuclear proliferation – transcend national and even continental boarders and consequently require collective action.

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